

"THEY HAD BEEN WITH JESUS."

– JAN. 31. – ACTS 4:1-14. –

"There is none other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved."

AS the apostles were preaching Christ, taking for their text the manifestation of his power through Peter in the healing of the impotent man at the temple gate "Beautiful," and while the devout worshipers heard them gladly and repentantly, the theologians were disturbed; it seemed monstrous to them that any but themselves should undertake to teach the people, and that the people were giving more interested attention to these "laymen" than they gave to them, – the chief priests, religious rulers and doctors of the law. In this they but manifested the usual worldly spirit, which in every religious system except the true one manifests special opposition to any light or teaching which does not emanate from those recognized as "ordained" teachers. True, these apostles were ordained by the very highest authority in the universe – the spirit and power of God, communicated by Christ; but such ordination, such authority to teach, was not recognized by those doctors of divinity who, like their successors to this day, failed to recognize the ordinations of God and merely recognize human authorizations to preach.

Not only were they envious that others than themselves should have the ear of the people for religious instruction, but they had listened sufficiently to the discourse themselves to ascertain that the apostles were really imparting to the people some knowledge of spiritual things. The people were actually being *taught*, and that upon subjects concerning which they, the recognized doctors of divinity and theology, knew nothing and could teach nothing. If, therefore, such teachings were permitted, the worshipers would very soon know more than their religious rulers, which would never do. They were unable to teach the people themselves, and were not humble enough of heart to receive

instruction, and hence were quite ready to [R2096 : page 28] be overcome by the spirit of envy, hatred and malice, against those whom the Lord had appointed and was using, while passing them by. They had power to stop the preaching and to imprison the apostles, and they made haste to use it.

This same spirit was equally manifested, and even more unrighteously, by the Roman Catholics during the dark ages: they not only imprisoned but tortured and put to death those who ventured to instruct the people in spiritual things without their permission, ordination, etc. This same spirit was manifested to a considerable extent by the reformers also, we are sorry to say: Calvin, Luther, and numbers in authority in the Episcopal Church from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries were similarly grieved with efforts to instruct the people outside their own channels; and the same spirit to a considerable extent followed some who fled from persecutions, in the Mayflower, to this free land. We need not accuse any of these of intentional wrong: they lived in a time when religion and politics were blended, and they verily thought they did God service in opposing as they did that which they considered to be "heresy." Had they opposed the heresy with force of logic and Scripture merely, and sought thus to vanquish what they believed to be errors, with what they believed to be truth, they would not only have been worthy of approval, but also of admiration, and they might have been led into the truth; but their zeal misled them into the use of unjust means, and they more or less fought against God. But be it noted, all these improper efforts were unavailing to suppress the truth, and merely served to purify and refine the saints, as "gold tried in the furnace."

Intelligence and liberty during the last century have to a large extent annulled the power of the spiritual rulers, and unwillingly confined their opposition against advancing truth to anathemas, excommunications, insinuations as to "unorthodox," and social ostracism. And as each reform grew in strength and asserted itself, these oppositions gradually died out; – as, for instance, the opposition to the

"Quakers," to "Baptists," to "Disciples," and others. But as we read the signs of the times in the light of the divine revelation, we have every reason to believe that the present movement in favor of "Christian union" will eventuate in such a combination of all the powerful and influential religious systems as to affect politics and laws, and put into the hands of theologians the power to head off the further advance of divine truth and to stop the spirit-ordained ambassadors of Christ from teaching the people advanced truths respecting the close of this and the dawn of the new dispensation.

Arrogantly accustomed to overawing the common people with their titles, learning and authority, the High Priest and all the priestly family, and the religious rulers, and elders, and learned scribes, met as a court to hear, to overawe, to browbeat and to condemn Peter and John for their temerity in attempting to teach the people.

They were surprised when the two men whom they had judged from their general manner, dress, etc., to be "unlearned," not theologians, but of the "common people," addressed them meekly, simply, yet with holy boldness, concerning Jesus of Nazareth and his power to heal: – as much since his crucifixion and resurrection as before. Peter if speaking of himself might have been inclined to avoid mentioning the guilt of his hearers in connection with the crucifixion of our Lord; but as a chosen vessel for this very purpose he was specially under the control of the holy spirit; and, although in no bitter or acrimonious language, he told his hearers the plain truth concerning their guilt as the crucifiers of Jesus, and showed them from the prophets that they had set at naught the chief stone of the spiritual temple of God; but that nevertheless God had highly exalted him to be the Head over the Church, which is his body – the spiritual temple – into which we as living stones are being built up.

There is no ambiguity in preaching done thus, under the inspiration of the holy spirit: it is direct, to the point. Peter did not say that Jesus of Nazareth was *one* of the great teachers of the world, and as worthy to

be heard as Moses or Confucius or others; neither did he say, It makes no difference whether you ever hear of the historic Christ or not, as some false teachers now declare. Peter's spirit-inspired teachings were evidently not at all in harmony with what is known as the "new theology," nor with what is known as the "higher criticism," nor with what is known as the "broad theology," espoused by the Chicago Parliament of Religions, and advocated by many of the "great theologians" of our day. Peter gave the message direct and with force – "There is *none other name* given, under heaven or among men, whereby we must be saved." In these words he told his learned hearers that there was no hope of salvation in Moses and in the Law, any more than in the heathen systems of theology – that knowledge of, and faith in, and obedience to Christ was the only God appointed way of salvation.

What could they say! What could they do! under such circumstances? They had utterly failed to overawe these humble fishermen, and instead had received a discourse from them, which was wholly unexpected under such conditions. They were not in the humble attitude of heart to be affected as were the three thousand who on the Day of Pentecost were pricked to the heart and converted; nor were they of the humble, worshipful, teachable spirit of the five thousand worshipers who had been converted by hearing the apostles in the temple the day before. They could do nothing but marvel. But they took knowledge of the fact, that the same meek and quiet spirit of Jesus was in these, his disciples, and the same powerful logic, directness of discourse and humility of manner.

So let it be with each of us, the followers of Jesus! If we have opportunity for testifying to his grace and gospel, let us not fear to declare the whole counsel of God, but let us not do it rudely nor unkindly, but with the gentleness and force which are of the spirit of the truth.
